

Workforce Innovation and Performance Committee of the Monroe County/Rochester Workforce Development Board
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, June 2, 2020
8:00 to 9:00 AM
Meeting Scheduled via ZOOM

Present: Jennifer Geiger, Hanif Abdul-Wahid, Elizabeth O'Brien, Gary Rogers, Joe Wesley, Seanelle Hawkins, Richard Turner, Cherie Becker, Marion French, Romanda Gibson-Stevenson, Edie Arlauckas

Staff and Guest: Lee Koslow, Peter Pecor, Viatta Carter, Kathy Ziegler, Paula Roth, Mary McKeown

Approval of Minutes:

A motion to approve the March 3, 2020 meeting minutes was made by Gary Rogers and seconded by Richard Turner. The motion was carried unanimously

Revision to WIOA Policy 104 Individual Training Account (ITA) Guidelines:

Lee began the discussion by reviewing a document regarding Support of Sector Strategy Initiatives. This is one of the clauses from our training policy, the Individual Training Account Policy. We started this 2 years ago, where we decided to go along with our local plan, where we want to support Sector Strategy Initiatives, particularly in our priority sectors in the regional plan, health care and advanced manufacturing. What we have done is we've taken a certain percentage of our ITA Training Budget for the program year, which starts July 1st, and we'd set it aside so that we had money available to support sector strategy programs that were community wide—county wide or maybe larger—to the extent that they didn't have their own training funds. It supported CNA, LPN, similar health care professions training and it has supported some of the Advanced Manufacturing training, particularly at MCC, that we've been able to do. We've probably done more CNA and LPN than anything else with this pot of money. Particularly last year, we had a larger training budget and we'd been setting aside 25% of that until December 31st. This program year, New York State has lost a piece of the pie and in addition to that, our carry-in into next year might be a little bit smaller because of monies that we've had to spend in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We'd still like to propose that we commit to the Sector Strategy Initiatives. Right now, the two community-wide federal grant funded programs are HPOG and SWFI.

To be able to support it, for the program year beginning 7/1/2020 and ending 6/30/2021, we are proposing to set aside 10% instead of 25% of the WIOA ITA budget to be reserved for HPOG and/or SWFI participants training in one of the priority sectors. Any amount of this funding not awarded by 9/30/2020 will be released to be used to fund any ITA approvable under this policy.

A question was raised at this time if SWFI is still being funded or is the funding scheduled to exhaust? Lee responded that his understanding was that the grant was through June 30, 2020 and they got a no-cost extension, it might be a full year no-cost extension, so they will be operating after July 1st.

Another question raised inquired that with the changes, is RW going to have to make any reductions in staff? Lee responded that not currently under the budget that we think we have. Peter Pecor added that Lee's response is correct and the 3 or 4 unfilled positions we have will not be backfilled at this time. There will not be a reduction in staff, but we're not going to be adding to staff as we would have originally proposed under normal circumstances. Peter and Lee asked if there were any objections to this proposal and no objections were made. At this time Lee stated that we'll carry this recommendation to the Board. At the upcoming Board meeting, they'll vote on those changes to the policy.

Career Center Services During COVID-19 (including future reopening of the career centers):

Lee Koslow stated this area of discussion will include what's different now, about Career Center services during the COVID-19 Pandemic, what we've been doing to serve customers right now and what we envision in terms of reopening the Career Center, hopefully in the near future.

Paula Roth, Assistant Manager of the Career Center, reported on staffing and their current activities during this time. Initially, a specific phone line was set up so that when customers called into the Career Center, they could leave a voice mail message specifically for the Initial Skills Assessment Team. Staff were set up with phones that would enable them to return these calls to the customers. Whenever possible, staff are still conducting Initial Skills Assessments for these customers. Brand new customers would be sent the form that is needed so that a record could be created for them in the OSOS system. A resume mailbox has also been set up where customers can email their resumes to the ISA Team and staff have been reviewing the resumes during this time. Many calls received are in regard to the Unemployment piece and have been fielded as best they can. Customers have stated their appreciation in being able to speak to a live person. In addition to fielding general calls coming into the Career Center, they've been responding to the incoming online requests received from customers. Staff have also been working with their existing pool of customers, especially the 5 Steps to Rapid Employment participants, reviewing what they should be working on at this time, recommending workshops currently available online and also reviewing their resumes. Some customers have reported they've gained employment during this time. Staff are also doing Initial Assessments with ACCES-VR for individuals they're assisting.

Paula has also reported the Training Team has been very busy with their call line, fielding all calls from individuals looking to get or needing information on funding. They have been doing ITAs throughout this process and now with the new Fall schedule due to come out, they've been actively receiving calls from primarily the Health Care field. They also continue to work with individuals who are part of the Trade Act.

Viatta Carter reported on E-Learning and current plans for re-opening the Career Center. Viatta included that we started developing our E-Learning section of workshops earlier this year. We currently have 8 or 9 E-Learning workshops included on our website. Staff are promoting these workshops when they're working with customers. The process includes the customer registering for the workshops through Eventbrite. Once they've registered, they need to create an account. Once the account has been created, they're able to proceed with as many workshops as they want. Quizzes come along with these E-Learning workshops. As they complete the various sections, there are mini quizzes that come along with that. Once they've completed all of the modules and have successfully passed the quizzes, the customer will receive a certificate from RW. That certificate is sent to us electronically and RW will then be able to give the customer credit in OSOS for attending. We've been averaging 20-25 participants per E-Learning workshop. Viatta added that in addition, we've been doing ZOOM workshops, averaging 25-30 participants. We're working on putting our Disability and Disclosure workshop on ZOOM and E-Learning.

Viatta also shared that we continue to do Job Clubs on ZOOM with the individuals in our Reentry Program at the downtown jail. Job Clubs will continue every Friday via ZOOM at the jail.

Regarding the re-opening of the Career Center, Viatta noted the Career Center is moving to 100 College Avenue, Suite 200. The moving process has gone very well and all Career Center staff have moved into this location and have set up their cubicles and offices. Viatta is in the process of coming up with some ideas and ways on how to re-open, including how to gradually bring staff back into the office. She's working on creating a policy and procedure on how to do this. She'll be gathering input from staff regarding concerns/fears they have in regard to returning to the office and working with co-workers and customers. A staff meeting to share ideas and gather concerns will be held via ZOOM this Friday. Viatta would like staff to feel comfortable in returning to the office and will make sure that staff understand what the re-entry process will be.

Peter Pecor included that there are some staff who have specific restrictions from a health standpoint; maybe they've gone through a surgery or have other reasons why they really can't come back, so we are going to recognize that. In other areas of the State, they're talking about doing a rotating basis, limited staff, things of this nature. Peter extended his compliments to Viatta and Paula in their efforts to successfully structure ourselves with our virtual process. Peter has also mentioned that during this period of time, we've had ongoing recruitments with the County of Monroe and there have been new job orders being entered into the system on a regular basis.

Viatta would like to have some staff come into the office around June 15th, although there is still additional work that needs to be done. She has administrative staff that don't necessarily work with customers, so it has been a bit of a challenge making sure they have enough work to do throughout the week. She's come up with some creative ideas in keeping staff busy and has been successful in doing so. She hopes with a possible return around June 15th that all staff who occupy offices could possibly return and start working from the Career Center. As ISA Team Members work within cubicles, Viatta will be reviewing alternative ways for staff to work. She'll be reviewing the appointment and walk-in systems to see how they may need to be changed as well.

A question was raised at this time, regarding E-Learning workshops, on what has been done to address people that have that digital divide? Paula Roth stated there haven't been any issues with the E-Learning piece. Kathy Ziegler, St. Paul Street Career Center, stated that they run into this problem quite a bit because most of their customers have cell phones, not computers, to actually do the work they would need to do. As their clientele base is a little bit different, they've been preparing the resumes for their customers who are work ready. Once the resume is prepared, they'll email the resume back to the customer. The customer can then access that over the phone, so they're still able to apply for jobs that way.

In addition, the City of Rochester and Monroe County residents have access to various technological devices. The City is partnering with the Library System in providing free Mi-Fi devices for City residents. If they do in fact have a Library card, they are able to get a Mi-Fi device for the duration of the pandemic. To obtain a device, all they need to provide is their name, address, phone number, email address and date of birth. If they have a Library card, they would include that information as well. If they do not have a Library card, the Central Library will work with them over the phone to open up a Library account for that individual. Pick-ups began on May 18th and included approximately 100 Mi-Fi units that were available at the Downtown Central Library location. Pick-ups were scheduled by appointment only. It is recommended that the individual call the Central Library directly to begin this process to be able to qualify and pick up their device to use for their work search needs.

Another question raised at this time included a concern on what is preventing the social distancing going on in the Career Center right now and if the new Career Center location on College Avenue will be accommodated for that when we're eventually able to re-open? Viatta Carter responded that all staff will have masks and cleaning will be done on a regular basis. Staff will have their temperature taken and we have not yet determined if temperatures will be taken for customers and the related responsibilities that go along with that. Social distancing procedures will definitely be in place at the new location. Staffing schedules, break rooms, lunches, cleaning routines, etc. are all being looked at as far as how to schedule these.

Peter Pecor noted at this time, that at this stage of the game, in knowing the enormous number of new claimants for Unemployment Insurance, we have not heard from the Department of Labor as to what the requirements are going to be for the Career Centers. Obviously, the Career Centers across the state cannot accommodate the large number of claimants that there are and what services will we need to be providing for individuals who will be asked to return to their former positions. These are items we really don't have a handle on yet. Peter also included the idea of possibly having group sessions that could be held in a designated area/auditorium that is not currently being used. We could therefore spread out individuals and provide services on a group basis if in fact we have to deal with a much larger number of claimants.

Another question raised at this time was if each of the Career Centers, within a region or somewhere within New York State, could coordinate the expectations and propose to the State what our best practices would be in order to reopen the doors? Peter Pecor responded that he's been meeting weekly with his counterparts from the GLOW and Finger Lakes areas and are coordinating, on a regional basis, policies and procedures for this purpose.

Lee Koslow included a couple of things to get the information out there on the challenges that the Career Centers throughout the State are facing when it comes to reopening. Ideally, as many as do have or can get access to a computer, etc. and broadband access and have the comfort level or knowledge in how to use it, we would like to continue offering virtual services to as many as can benefit from them. Individuals without a computer or ability to use right now would be the individuals that could be given priority to come into the Career Center on an appointment basis. This would also enable us to socially distance a small workshop and 1:1 appointments. We'll have to be mindful in that the number of individuals coming into the Career Center will have to be controlled. It will initially have to be on an appointment basis. Lee added what also has us concerned throughout the State is that it continues to be a challenge to apply for Unemployment benefits. Because the number is just so large, even a small percentage who haven't been able to get through to an agent or get their claim completed, or for whatever reason their Unemployment claim stops and they're still certifying, but not getting any money and no one is talking to them, that becomes a large number of people. We are concerned that they will all come into the Career Centers as soon as they open, and we cannot have that because we do not have the answers for them. There has to be a way to address that issue, and it could delay certain phases of reopening the Career Centers, until NYSDOL has a handle on those types of issues.

Next, Lee Koslow discussed where E-Learning and workshops are located on the website. He demonstrated where to find the section on Available Online Courses and how to access each item. He also showed where to access the Workshop Calendar and how to register for a workshop. Participants registered with RochesterWorks! will receive a certificate and credit upon completion of the workshop.

At this time, Peter Pecor shared that we are also developing a Youth Center with the City of Rochester and will be located at 57 St. Paul Street. This building is now owned by the City; the Recreation and Youth Bureau. We will be moving the entire Youth Team there and the idea is to create a Youth Center for the County, something we've been working on for many years. It's currently been stalled due to the current pandemic, but will be very positive for the community.

Next Meeting Scheduled: September 1, 2020

Meeting adjourned at 8:56 AM

Submitted by: Mary McKeown

Reviewed by:

Lee Koslow 6/8/2020